

# BECOMING A COMMUNITY SHARED VALUE

A Values Based Roadmap for Destination  
Organizations to Embrace Community Alignment



A DESTINATIONS INTERNATIONAL  
ADVOCACY WORKBOOK

JULY 2021

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# PREFACE

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## **WHAT IS A COMMUNITY SHARED VALUE?**

A community shared value is a value that is appreciated at an individual level and shared by every member of the community.

Community values are the non-negotiable core principles or standards that the community's residents wish to maintain. They must be acknowledged, honored and constantly defended to ensure that change and development occur in accordance with these.

Community values guide the community's vision, mission and strategic plan as well as its goals, objectives, activities, capital projects, budgets and services.

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In 2018 and early 2019, the advocacy and research staff of Destinations International spent considerable time reviewing a myriad of source materials on individual destination organizations in the United States and Canada. The goal was to understand why so many destinations organization budgets, or even the organization itself, were under political attack. Sources included press coverage, editorials, websites, press releases, social media postings, newsletters, newscasts, podcasts, program audit reports, government RFPs for destination marketing services, memos, city plans and minutes of government meetings related to those RFPs and countless hours of local government public hearings posted on YouTube.

As we poured through all the information, we started grouping what we had found into categories and, in the end, we saw three major categories emerge. There were failures by the organizations that had made them vulnerable to political attacks. All three of these failures could be tied back to a single, simple principle. A simple orientation to build the destination organization's efforts and activities around.

Who were they doing everything for? Who was their ultimate customer?

In the past, they may have thought about the hospitality industry with hotels and restaurants front and center. Or they may have claimed it was their visitors in general, with specific segments of visitors prioritized. While these are understandable and important, they fail to appreciate why destination organizations were created in the first place.

At the end of this review, we became convinced that destination organizations were doomed to a life of periodic political attacks, unstable budget resources and potential failure unless they turned and focused on their true ultimate customer — the residents of the destination. And in doing so, embraced their civic role, complete with basic and fiduciary responsibilities.

The following is a summary of the three major categories of failures that emerged from the review.



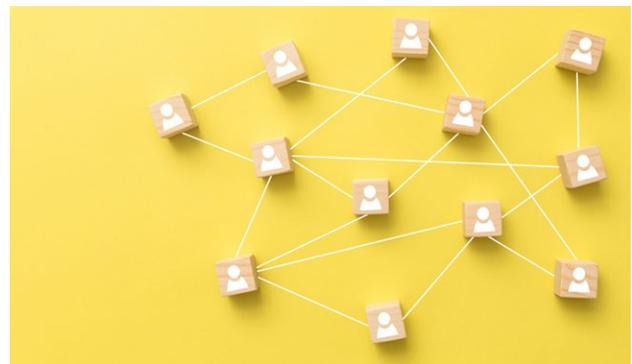
## **REASON ONE: NOTABLE FIDUCIARY FAILURES WITHIN THE INDUSTRY**

Let's start by looking at just a few of the things we have found in all those budget documents and audit reports we looked at, as well as some of the news reports covering them:

- “Does not ensure that public funds are being used effectively and efficiently.”
- “Deficient procurement and contracting practices undermine accountability and does not ensure best value.”
- “Disregarded its own procurement procedures.”
- “Does not meet even the minimal level of prudence required...when disbursing public funds.”
- “Does not consistently follow...established policies and procedures and laws.”
- “Missing receipts.”
- “No signatures.”
- “Commingled funds.”
- “Used vague metrics that made it hard... to tell how or how well or where it spent... millions of dollars.”
- “They talk about industry standards, and we don't understand them.”
- “Does not give any meaningful information pertaining to ROI.”
- “Council delays marketing vote amid transparency concerns.”

- “City spends millions a year on its tourism agency, but we have no idea if that's money well spent.”
- “How did a festival lose \$2.3 million?”
- “Pleaded guilty to 7 counts of felony theft.”
- “Beginning to question the...convention and visitors bureau model.”

When you read the comments above, you must ask, is it any surprise that many people see our industry as an easy target to attack?



## **REASON TWO: THE LACK OF COMMUNITY RELEVANCE**

Destination organizations are too often finding their relevance in a community is weak or non-existent. There seems to be a disconnect between the destination organization and the community it claims to serve. Members of the industry often have joked that “not even their families know what it is that they do” — much less friends and neighbors. Unfortunately, in way too many cases, that is not a joke. It is the truth.

Additionally, rarely is the community, either as a whole or through its leaders, fully or even partially engaged. They most likely have not been involved in any brand development or seen promotional campaigns launched on their behalf. Mechanisms for collecting public input are regularly absent. The community

does not know the destination organization's priorities or understand the reasons behind them. They have little understanding of what is involved in building destination awareness, business acquisition or driving visitation. Few understand why a hotel development, sports facility or convention center is so important in a community.

This means that there is no community ownership of the destination organization or a community narrative about the shared value it represents. The community's lack of familiarity gives grandstanding politicians and others fertile ground to control the narrative.



### **REASON THREE: RESPONSES NO LONGER RESONATE**

As if things were not complicated enough, the civic and political ground on which we stand has shifted. Over the last several decades, there have been societal changes on a massive scale. We have seen high-profile scandals, the great recession, terrorist attacks, the initial effects of climate change, civil rights, human rights, urbanization, globalization, new patterns of immigration and expanded means of communication.

Traditional societal roles and expectations have been upended. Technological advancements are increasing the pace of change, and while they are creating new opportunities, these innovations are changing industries faster

than most economies and most governments can adjust. Workers are being displaced, and traditional modes of economic mobility are disappearing. With this change, divisions between winners and losers are being aggravated.

A more interconnected world has increased, rather than reduced, differences over ideas and identities. Our political leaders are finding that appeals to identity are useful for mobilizing their supporters and consolidating their political control.

There has been a growing distrust in traditional institutions, and it has been amplified by individual fear of change, fear of the unknown and fear of loss. This lack of trust amplified by growing fear results in people acting based on emotion and gathering in teams based on identity.

Because of this, the narrative we have used in the past no longer resonates. We talk to the public, to elected officials and to the media about industry performance measurements and return on investment that are often not understood or not believed. The logic of our arguments no longer seems to matter. And most of us have no other options in our playbook. We have few allies or constituencies beyond our core industry partners; no means to break through today's political chatter; nothing to keep a supportive elected official from flipping on us. And we have no answer to the response, "we don't believe you."

### **RESEARCH & PREPARATION**

In the spring and summer of 2019, Destinations International explored these findings and the conclusion we had drawn with specific groups within our membership and outside constituencies related to our industry. Refinements were made, and the final version

of the concept was presented at the 2019 Destinations International Annual Convention in St. Louis, Missouri, USA.

In that presentation, Destinations International stressed not only the need to make this change but committed to assisting our members in pivoting to this community and resident focus. We created this workbook to help with that effort.

As the advocacy and research staff of Destinations International began the effort to build this workbook, we began to understand that we needed a list of core industry values that are the non-negotiable core principles or standards that define those destination organizations that are focused on their community's residents.

We spent the fall of 2019 exploring what those were and presented the initial list at the Destinations International Advocacy Summit in Madison, Wisconsin, USA. Though slowed by the effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the staff took input and refined the list in 2020. It was only then that staff realized that these were more than a list of core values. Within these values is a roadmap for our members to fulfill the shared value of destination promotion in their communities. Within these values, building one upon another was the way forward.

The preparation of this workbook could not have been done without the support and assistance of Destinations International and the Destinations International Foundation's Board of Directors and the Destinations International Advocacy Committee. Furthermore, in one way or another, the whole staff of Destinations International from 2019 to 2021 have had an input on this project. Developing and expanding on the community's shared value has been a daily effort by the Advocacy &

Research Team of Destinations International. Additional support was provided by Natascha Adams, Jinal Dalal, Siyi Li, and Aja Selenic, student consultants from the New York University School of Professional Studies, the Jonathan M. Tisch Center of Hospitality, with the development of the case studies. Case studies were graciously provided by the destination organizations of Waterloo Region in Ontario, Rockford/Winnebago County in Illinois, Colorado Springs/Pikes Peak Region in Colorado, Mesa in Arizona, Raleigh/Wake County in North Carolina, Miami/Dade County in Florida, Centre County (Happy Valley) in Pennsylvania, Long Island Region in New York, and Sedona in Arizona.

Finally, this project was underwritten in part by the Destinations International Foundation. We thank all those who have donated to support the work of the Foundation.

## **WHAT YOU WILL NEED FOR THE WORKBOOK**

Each chapter of this Becoming a Community Shared Value Workbook discusses the topic and related exercise. These are questions to ask yourself or your organization as you begin the way across the roadmap. Each chapter on individual values will have one or more case studies and exercises linked to them. We encourage you to get a blank notebook to use with this workbook to take notes, record ideas and answer the exercise questions.



*Exercises noted with this highlight.*



*Case Studies noted with this highlight.*

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES**

- [Destinations International's Community Shared Value Website Page](#)
- [Destinations International Blog](#)
- [Destinations International Online Learning Center](#)



## CHAPTER 1

# SPECIAL INTEREST OR COMMON GOOD?

**SPECIAL INTEREST:** *The term “special interest” refers to a group of individuals or organizations, usually formally organized, that, based on one or more shared concerns, beliefs, or goals, attempts to influence public policy in its favor or to its benefit. It may also be known as an advocacy group or pressure group.*

**COMMON GOOD:** *The term “common good” refers to either what is shared and beneficial for all or most members of a given community or destination. Or what is achieved by citizenship, collective action and active participation in the realm of civic, political and/or public service.*

In government budgeting, things fall into two categories — common goods based on values held by the residents of that area and special interests. Common goods like education, fire and safety, transportation, health care and utilities are taken care of first. What is left over are special interests which are taken care of second. Many of us fall into the special interest category. But to succeed going forward, Destinations International believes that destination organizations need to fall into the common good category.

Destinations International believes that our industry’s role is to fill a community need and

that each destination organization provides necessary services. It is a common good. We base this on the answers to the following four simple questions and then by going where those answers lead us.

### 1. What is the community need?

We would argue that in today’s globalized, networked world, every community must compete with every other for its share of the world’s visibility — its share of attention and respect. Every community must compete for their share of the world’s tourists, their share of

consumers and their share of available talent. Every community must compete for their share of the world's businesses and their share of the available capital and investments. Those communities who fail to compete will lose ground. They will be left behind.

## 2. What is the solution?

The community needs infrastructure, public space, transportation, capacity and residents. But those alone are not enough. Destinations International argues that for a community to compete, people need to be made aware of that destination, they need to hear about it and they need to be able to find it when searching. People must have a clear and positive image of the destination's brand. This will create a desire for people to visit the destination, to experience the people for themselves and ultimately, share their experience with others.

## 3. What expertise do we bring to the equation?

We bring strategies to achieve awareness and positive impressions; brand development, management and communication; promotion, marketing, sales and visitor engagement. Sound familiar? Destination organizations are the experts. They have the tools, knowledge and relationships to provide the solutions. And most of all, they have something that no outside person will bring to the table: They have a love of their community to see it through.

But this also means that destination organizations have a bigger mission. It means that the mission is not to put "heads in beds." Measuring hotel occupancy is a good measurement, but not the mission. Every visitor is important. Every impression is important. Everything that allows a community to compete is important.

## 4. Who are destination organizations helping? Who is the customer?

Seth Godin, author of the book "This Is Marketing," says that the answer to just about every question about work is really this question, "Who is the customer?" It should be the starting point of every strategic plan. The answer is that destination promotion is for the benefit and wellbeing of every person in a community. It is an essential investment to develop opportunities and build quality of life to benefit the people of a destination.

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*"There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about."*

– Margaret J. Wheatley  
*American Writer*

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What is our industry always pointing to? How many jobs are created, how much local spending is generated, how much local tax revenue is generated and how much economic activity is generated. So, who is helped by this? Who is our customer? It is the residents of the community.

A destination organization's primary customer is not meeting planners, event planners, concert promoters, association executives, tour operators, travel writers, bloggers, influencers or anyone else we traditionally have called our customers. They are the suppliers. They supply the raw material a community needs to compete, — the needed ingredient to create a vibrant community — to build a community and to invest in a community. They bring people. And the people are tourists, consumers and talent. And those people bring business, investment and capital.

And we do this to develop dynamic economic opportunities in our communities. And why should we do this? To help the people in our destinations. Our families, our friends, our neighbors — our community. That is why the work you do is so very, very important. And why everyone in our communities should know about it.



## FINDING OUR CORNERSTONE

When you put the answers to those questions together, you get something amazing. You get our cornerstone. You get the reason why destination organizations exist.

*“Every community must compete with every other community for their share of the world’s attention, customers and investment. To compete, people need to be aware of a community, have a positive impression, and want to visit to experience the community and meet its people. This is achieved through clearly developing, articulating and managing the community’s brand. Efforts must be made to promote, market, sell and engage potential visitors. And all of this must be reinforced again and again. Destination organizations are uniquely positioned to do this. Addressing this need for destination promotion is for the benefit and well-being of every person in a community. It is a common good. It is an essential investment to develop opportunities and build quality of life to benefit all the*

*residents of a community.”*

*This should be your starting point as you draft your “about us” and “mission statements.” When your organization resembles this cornerstone, your organization becomes a community cornerstone, which means that you and your team are community assets. This is our industry’s ideology. These are our ideas — our ideals that bind us together. And these ideas form the basis of a community shared value. Further than that, these words are the argument for the public support of destination promotion.*

This cornerstone is the direction that Destinations International firmly believes that we as an industry must move toward. We must become that shared value in each one of our communities.

## COMMON GOOD EXERCISE #1



Take out your notebook, think about your destination, and answer the following questions:

1. Does your organization have a mission, vision and “about us” statements? If so, write them out in the notebook.
2. Compare your statements with the Cornerstone statement and identify ways they are alike or different.
3. Are your statements that of a special interest or a common good? Why?

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- [Destinations International’s Finding Our Cornerstone Brief](#)



## CHAPTER 2

# THE IMPORTANCE OF CORE VALUES

*Core values are the root beliefs that a person or organization operates from. They are important and lasting beliefs or ideals shared by the members of a culture about what is good or bad and desirable or undesirable. These core values serve as broad guidelines in all situations.*

Your values determine your priorities. When you value something, you consider it important and worthwhile — and fund it. Values have major influence on behavior and attitude (or should!). And people tend to frame arguments, and the facts behind them, in terms of their own values because values are where emotion and logic meet.

Destinations International has talked about core values quite a bit over the last few years. We are behind the concept of destination organizations becoming a shared value in each of their communities. And we provided the foundation for the development of the Tourism Lexicon.

We have identified nine key values that we as an industry should be living and staying true to.

- 1. Passion**
- 2. Awareness**
- 3. Transparency**
- 4. Inclusion**
- 5. Engagement**
- 6. Collaboration**
- 7. Innovation**
- 8. Stewardship**
- 9. Relevance**

These core values are the root beliefs our industry should be operating from. They inform us what is desirable. They determine our priorities. And they also do one more thing. Together, they provide a roadmap that leads to destination promotion being that

shared value, that shared core value in each of our communities. And these nine core values help us build public support around a shared vision for the destination and support for the destination organization.



### **CASE STUDY: THE FEDERATION OF QUÉBEC MAPLE SYRUP PRODUCERS**

One of the things we noticed as we built out the Community Shared Value concept was that we were in many ways writing a planning document for our industry, complete with vision, mission, values and goals. When you add Destinations International's Destination NEXT Futures Study, you add industry trends and strategies. We tried to identify another industry that had done this, and we could not find any.

However, we did find something close in the Quebec Maple Syrup Producers, a government-sanctioned union of syrup producers. This organization controls over 70 percent of the maple syrup market. The organization has been largely successful in stabilizing prices in an industry where the supply is never predictable because of annual variations in production. It does this by having many drums of maple syrup stacked at the Global Maple Syrup Strategic Reserve in rural Québec. Surpluses are stored in good years, and it is from the reserve that syrup is released in the lean years.

It is a fascinating organization with an interesting history that includes a multimillion-dollar syrup heist. But for our purposes, we are

*\*Source: Québec Maple Syrup Producers*

interested in the fact that they laid out industry values, defined them and put them up on the website for everyone to see.

#### **About the Federation\***

Maple syrup is a long-standing symbol of Québec culture. Today it enjoys international renown. This boom in popularity can be attributed to the will and vision of Québec's maple producers. Over the past few decades, these women and men have worked together with passion and determination to establish a marketing system that is unique in the world.

In affirming the importance of always applying recognized ethical principles, the following values guide Québec Maple Syrup Producers in its deliberations, actions and decisions:

- **Community** - To always pursue the group interest by favoring collective action and democratic decision-making within our organization.
- **Openness** - To hear the needs of our producers, partners and consumers here and elsewhere.
- **Passion** - To always take energy from the enthusiasm generated by Québec maple products.
- **Innovation** - To distinguish ourselves through innovation to build a bold future. To pursue excellence, support creativity and show leadership in new ways.
- **Democracy** - To build our organization and its orientations through a consultation and governance process that gives everybody a voice in decisions.
- **Sustainability** - To develop Québec's maple resources in a sustainable manner and ensure that future generations can do the same.

## PUTTING OUR CORE VALUES TO WORK

By identifying overall industry core values, we as a group can try to make our decisions and review our performance through the lens of these values. Weaving these values, community by community across the globe, into our relationships with our stakeholders and residents ensures that we share these priorities as we go about building, promoting and highlighting the role of the destination organization as an important part of any community. As we plan for the future of our industry, our plans will be rooted in our role as a community shared value.

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*“When we talk about values, we’re talking about core principles that drive every interaction within an organization. From break room conversations to massive make-or-break projects, values are everything.”*

*– Chris J. Ihrig  
Fired Up! Culture*

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## DO THESE VALUES REPLACE OUR INDIVIDUAL DESTINATION ORGANIZATION’S VALUES?

The short answer is no. But just as the Cornerstone statement should be the starting point when crafting your “Mission” and “About Us” statements, these industry core values are the starting point for your own list of core values.

The longer answer is industry core values serve as an overall umbrella for all destination organizations. They address the characteristics and responsibilities of every destination organization. But each destination has its unique characteristics, history and priorities — its own culture — that should be reflected in its own set of values. Your core values reflect

your culture. It is what makes your destination organization one of a kind, beyond your services and activities. It is your reputation — the qualities people think of when they think of you. Frankly, it is why people want to join your organization and support your mission.

A positive, productive culture has the power to make prospective employees, stakeholders and residents want to partner with you and stay with you for the long term. Even more, many experts agree that organizational culture can influence productivity, creativity, profitability and growth rates. By identifying your company’s core values, you can better define your culture — your greater mission and reasons for existing as your community’s destination organization, beyond the tangible assets or services you provide.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- [Fired Up Culture](#)
- [Producteurs et productrices acéricoles du Québec / The Québec Maple Syrup Producers](#)



## CHAPTER 3

# A COMMUNITY ALIGNMENT ROADMAP

*Roadmap: Originally a map designed for motorists to get from one place to another, it has evolved to be any plan or guide to show how something is arranged or can be accomplished.*

*A destination alignment roadmap is designed to show destinations how to get from being a special interest to becoming a common good. It is a guide to show how building public support around a shared vision for the destination will foster support for the destination organization.*

### WHY DO WE NEED A ROADMAP?

A roadmap is traditionally a map designed for motorists, showing the primary cities and towns of an area along with the chief roads. The roadmap usually identifies key tourist attractions and places of interest. Some roadmaps contain geographical features such as rivers, lakes and mountains. And with all of these maps, you can calculate the distance and estimate the time to get from one point to another.

The term roadmap has been adopted for use with strategic plans and product development. These roadmaps can be used to visualize your efforts by capturing all the activities you

will complete within a given time frame and communicating all the significant upcoming work in one view. Roadmaps can be used to drive conversations, prioritize work, allocate resources and track requirements or obligations.

Unlike the traditional roadmap, the strategic or product roadmap is not static. You can adjust as plans change, show progress as work is completed and milestones achieved. For purposes of seeking investment, your roadmap should allow you to create tailored views for different audiences. The strategic or product roadmap should motivate people as it is a visual guide that defines the work that

is required for the team to be its best and investors to sign on.

Roadmaps should work with your vision, mission and about-us statements — building upon one another — as you will need all four to create winning plans and realize your goals. They are particularly critical to shifting or broadening an organization’s focus, as you will do when moving away from being a special interest and instead becoming a shared

### **BUILDING A ROADMAP FOR DESTINATION ORGANIZATIONS TO EMBRACE COMMUNITY ALIGNMENT**

As we have watched our members successfully pivot to embrace the Community Shared Value approach, we have learned a lot about what makes a destination organization successful. Of course, no two destination organizations are exactly alike because no two destinations are exactly alike. However, when we observe effective destination organizations — and destination organizations that have built a solid base of support in their community — we can say that these share a specific set of core values. Likewise, when we try to understand why some destination organizations are less effective than others, what we often see is that these organizations’ failures are tied directly to the absence of these core values.

As we pointed out in Chapter Two, core values are the root beliefs that a person or organization operates from. They are important and lasting beliefs or ideals shared by the members of a culture about what is good or bad and desirable or undesirable. These core values serve as broad guidelines in all situations. But they can also serve as building blocks as well as milestones. As you intentionally embrace and live them, they become a series of points on a roadmap. And once you have them all in place, as you

travel from one to another, you will reach your destination — the ability to achieve alignment with your community and become a community shared value.

### **A VALUES-BASED ROADMAP**

Review the Values-Based Roadmap on the following page.

Community Shared Value is more than just your roadmap destination. It is the definition of what a destination organization should be — a shared community value. It is your goal. The vision of what destination organizations are to become. Furthermore, it is the starting point for an “About Us” statement that should live on your website and be part of any strategic or business plan you write up. ***It should be your answer when someone asks what your organization does.***

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES**

- [Destinations International Blog](#)

# A VALUES-BASED ROADMAP

1

## **PASSION**

Destination Passion is an intense enthusiasm for our destination, our community and its people.

2

## **AWARENESS**

Destination Awareness is a concern about and well-informed interest in the history, situation, people and/or development in our specific destination. It is also something to be fostered in others.

3

## **TRANSPARENCY**

Destination Transparency is all about being proactively open to stakeholder and public scrutiny.

4

## **INCLUSIVENESS**

Destination Inclusiveness means including and not excluding any area or neighborhood of our destination, any group or segment of people within our destination, or any history, culture or tradition.

5

## **ENGAGEMENT**

Destination Engagement is the process of informing and listening to groups of people within our destination to address issues affecting the wellbeing of the community and promotion of the destination.

6

## **COLLABORATION**

Destination Collaboration is the action of working with our stakeholders, to produce or create something within our destination.

7

## **INNOVATION**

Destination Innovation means to make changes in something established, especially by introducing new destination promotion methods, ideas, or products.

8

## **STEWARDSHIP**

Destination Stewardship is balancing economic development, sustainable tourism and quality of life.

9

## **RELEVANCE**

Destination Relevance comes from being closely connected and involved in what is being done or considered in our destination.

★

## **COMMUNITY SHARED VALUE**

Being a shared value in our destination means we are a community asset responsible for programs promoting a community as an attractive travel destination and enhancing its public image as a dynamic place to live and work. Through the knowledge of the destination, brand management, promotional programs, and the resulting impacts of visits by people, we strengthen the community's economic position and vitality, which provides opportunity for all the people in the destination.



## CHAPTER 4

# THE VALUE OF PASSION

*Destination Passion is an intense enthusiasm for our destination, our community and its people.*

*We are passionate about our destination. We have a strong desire to strengthen the community's economic position and vitality and provide opportunities for all its residents. And it is with enthusiasm and eagerness that we seek to tell the world the story of our destination, of our history, of our culture, of our community and of our people.*

### WHAT IS PASSION?

Of the nine industry core values that make up the community alignment roadmap, passion is probably the most personal and perhaps the most difficult to project onto an organization. But if any organization can embody passion, we believe it is a destination organization. That is because our industry is built on passion.

The word itself comes from the Latin root word, *patior*, which means to suffer. Today the word tends to convey the idea of an intense desire. Perhaps irrational. But always irresistible. And maybe, just maybe, if you are truly passionate, you are pushed along by your desire to the point where you are willing to

endure suffering and loss for the object, the goal, the person or the people, which are the focus of your attention. Perhaps that is how it ties back to the original meaning.

***“Passion is energy. Feel the power that comes from focusing on what excites you.”***

**– Oprah Winfrey**  
*American Television Host, Producer,  
Actress and Author*

According to research conducted by Tony Tjan and co-authors, Richard Harrington and Tsun-Yan Hsieh (Heart, Smarts, Guts, and Luck:

What It Takes to Be an Entrepreneur and Build a Great Business), 65% of founders have been identified as driven by “heart.” Tjan also added that most entrepreneurs are fueled “by an unshakable sense of purpose.” The authors point out that throughout all the trials and tribulations, entrepreneurs reward themselves internally by realizing that they are on a mission for the greater good. No matter how bad it gets, it is their passion that motivates them between paydays and failures and during all the times when everyone else tells them to quit.

That kind of sounds like a destination professional. It kind of sounds like us.

Think about how many of us work an insane number of hours without any overtime. Think about the long hours of research and interviews and brainstorming and word crafting merely to sum up the essence of our community in a single sentence or statement. Why would we put ourselves through this? We are driven to promote our communities as attractive travel destinations and to enhancing the local public image as a dynamic place to live and work. And through destination stewardship and brand importance, we are driven to strengthen the community’s economic position and vitality, which provides opportunity for all the people in the destination. At the heart of it, we are driven to either solve a problem or make something better. And that something is our community.

### **WHAT DRIVES PASSION?**

Two emotions – love and hate — drive passion. Not surprisingly, love and hate are intimately linked within the human brain. Studies have identified the biological actions for the two most intense emotions. Both love and hate use some of the same nervous circuits in the brain suggesting that while the two emotions appear to be opposites, they are related. They drive

passion. They create the energy behind the value.

Remember what we said when we began this effort to make destination organizations a shared value in their communities — values are where emotion and logic meet. The value of passion is driven by our love of our community and our love of travel. We would argue that it is also driven by the things we hate about our communities and travel that we seek to fix. We find ourselves constantly seeking to make what is good a little bit better and what is bad something that gets fixed. We are driven to strengthen the community’s economic position and vitality, which provides opportunity for all the people in the destination. It is a very logical thing to do. But it is driven by our passion and fueled by its energy.

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*“Yes, in all my research, the greatest leaders looked inward and were able to tell a good story with authenticity and passion.”*

*– Deepak Chopra  
Indian-American Author*

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### **WHY IS PASSION IMPORTANT?**

The answer is simple. Passion is the energy that keeps us going, that keeps us filled with meaning, happiness, excitement and anticipation. Passion is a powerful force in accomplishing anything you set your mind to, and in fully experiencing both work and life. But most important for successful destination promotion is that passion drives traits needed for success. When you are passionate about something, you will become creative with it. You will want to produce greater results doing it because you love to do it. Passion attracts passion. When you have passion, it can help you attract talent in the form of other passionate people, and when you are

passionate about what you do, you will never give up. Successful people love what they do, and that is why they do not mind failing and then starting over again. They are optimists. Creativity, attracting passionate talent and optimism. What we do is hard work, it is important work, and those three traits help us succeed. They help us tell the story of our destination and, they drive us to promote it.



### **PASSION EXERCISE #1**

Think about your community, your destination and take out your notebook and answer the following questions:

1. What is someplace or some local activity that, when immersed in it, you lose track of time?
2. What about your community and/or your destination organization can you talk about for hours, and when you talk about it, you light up?
3. What gets your blood boiling? What is a problem in the destination that you would love to fix?
4. What is your favorite story that captures the spirit of your destination?



### **CASE STUDY: EXPLORE WATERLOO REGION, ONTARIO CANADA**

The Waterloo Region in Ontario, Canada, has been known predominantly for its tech-

industry hub, hosting many large institutions such as Shopify, Blackberry and Microsoft and nature-based tourism. The number of hiking and biking trails throughout the region rival their fellow Canadian destinations, but, sadly, many of the trails were not used for much of the last 12 months. With the COVID-19 pandemic hitting the entirety of the tourism sector since March 2020, destination organizations have struggled to ensure that their jobs, employees and communities have been able to thrive and survive. Engaging local people in tourism efforts to support the food and beverage sector was, and continues to be, paramount to keep as many businesses open for as long as possible.

Explore Waterloo Region, the regional destination marketing organization, explored various options to maintain the tourism and hospitality sectors. Through various initiatives that encouraged residents to make use of outside spaces, they have been able to keep establishments running through take-away initiatives and more. With this collaboration with the food and beverage sector, The Art Fresco project then came to fruition.

The Art Fresco Public Art Project initiative engaged with the community on a more intimate level. Having invested in 50 picnic tables, local artists from across the Waterloo cities and townships were contacted and asked to design and paint on the benches. These were then distributed around the region, being “showcased” at different eateries and outdoor spaces for the local community to enjoy. Not only did this provide work for many artists, but it gave incentive to locals to go and visit local businesses to get food and “rediscover their own backyard.”

In the future, the aim is to provide a platform where people can “collect” each of the picnic tables from across the region to encourage local tourism. As highlighted by Minto

*Photo Credit: Acknowledge by Chelsea Brunette-Hodzic*

Schneider, CEO of Explore Waterloo Region, the project incorporates the core values of Waterloo: community, inclusivity and creativity.



The impact of the project has been seen predominantly by the restaurants and establishments that host the benches. This project has given the organization the opportunity to engage with local stakeholders and transmitted their passion for their destination to visitors — whether it be their local citizens or from further afield in the region. The destination organization intends to create some kind of “scavenger hunt” platform where a visitor can download an app and scan a QR code on the bench to “collect” it. This could encourage visitors to explore the region more to try and find all 50 of the benches. This initiative will certainly increase visitation numbers across the area, especially once the lockdown has ended.

### **About Explore Waterloo Region**

With a population of over half a million, the Waterloo Region is made up of three vibrant cities — Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo — and four pastoral townships: North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot and Woolwich. Each one of these locations add opportunity for residents to share with you how they work and interact with each other.

*Photo Credit: Abe Erb's Grist Mill by Megan LaPoint*

The mission of Explore Waterloo Region is to increase visitation, by capitalizing on the inherent strengths of events, outdoor experiences, and the thriving knowledge sector within Waterloo Region.

Founded in 2007, Explore Waterloo Region is the Destination Marketing Organization for the Region of Waterloo. They are a nonprofit organization responsible for marketing our destination to increase the number of visitors and length of stay. They also work with our partners to promote festivals, events, attractions, restaurants and hotels and to develop new product offerings.

Explore Waterloo Region is an initiative of the Region of Waterloo and its seven member municipalities. The goal: to deliver a single, focused message that Waterloo Region is a dynamic, year-round destination with much to offer the individual traveler, families on vacation and corporate visitors. The mission is to increase visitation, by capitalizing on the inherent strengths of events, outdoor experiences, and the thriving knowledge sector within Waterloo Region.

### **PASSION EXERCISE #2**



Think about your community, your destination and take out your notebook and answer the following questions:

1. If you could create an event or project that would celebrate and showcase the passion you and others have for your destination, what would it be?
2. If you could create a civic art project in your destination, instead of picnic tables, what would you use?

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES**

- [Explore Waterloo Region presents the Art Fresco Public Art Project](#)
- [Explore Waterloo Region](#)
- [Destinations International Blog – The Value of Passion](#)



## CHAPTER 5

# THE VALUE OF AWARENESS

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*Destination Awareness is a concern about and well-informed interest in the history, situation, people and/or development in our specific destination. It is also something to be fostered in others.*

*We are aware. We ask questions. We research. We engage. And most of all, we observe and listen. We are well informed about our community, its past and its present and we understand the hopes and dreams of the people of our community — our home. We observe, ask, listen and process and then repeat that over and over.*

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Excerpted from the Destinations International Blog:

*Every spring and every fall I will run into someone who expresses the regret that they get only a couple weeks of the season. I found this was very common in Chicago where I spent most of my life. “If only we had more than a couple weeks of spring,” or “more than a couple weeks of fall” they would say. And I would fight the impulse to roll my eyes. Because what they are thinking of is not the season, but a small part of the season. They are thinking about that time when temperatures are mild, flowers*

*begin to bloom in the spring, leaves begin to turn colors in the fall. Their definition of spring or fall.*

*Why this drives me crazy is that it shows a total lack of awareness of the two seasons. You see, in Chicago the summer and winter are defined seasons in that they have defined characteristics that make them what they are. In summer, the days are long, and the nights are short. The temperatures are warm, or even hot, it rains, plants grow and the wind generally comes from the south. In winter it is the opposite. Short days, long nights, cold*

temperatures, snow, plants hibernate and the wind, as a rule, comes from the north.

On the other hand, spring and fall are transition seasons. They are defined by being both winter and summer, summer and winter. A transition from one to the other with parts of both. And the subtle differences in each day are defined by the bi-annual battle for dominance by the north and south winds and the small, but discernible changes in the length of the day and the placement of the sun in the sky. I find it fascinating.

Like many places, Chicago is defined by its seasons — as much as it is by its geographical location and features. As much as it is by its history, traditions and people. But only someone who pays attention would notice. Only someone who observes and listens. Only someone who asks questions. Only someone who has a passion for Chicago and is aware of what makes it Chicago.



### **AWARENESS EXERCISE #1**

Think about your community, your destination and take out your notebook and answer the following questions:

1. What environmental or geographic features or conditions help shape and define your destination?
2. What history has helped shape and define your destination?
3. What is their impact?
4. How does this make your destination different from most others?

### **DESTINATION AWARENESS**

We define “Destination Awareness” as a concern about and well-informed interest in the history, situation, people and/or development in our specific destination. It is also something

to be spread and generated in others.

As destination professionals, we are aware. We ask questions. We research. We engage. And most of all, we observe and listen. We are well informed about our community, its past and its present and we understand the hopes and dreams of the people of our community — our home. We observe, ask, listen and process and then repeat that over and over.

Looking at the nine industry core values that make up the community alignment roadmap, awareness is the natural second step. If you are passionate about something, you should know a lot about it. And while no one person will know everything, a destination organization filled with passionate and aware people will be able to answer most questions about a destination because someone on the team will know the answer to the questions. Passion drives awareness. And awareness makes you and your team the destination experts — for visitors and residents alike.

### **AWARENESS EXERCISE #2**



Think about your community, your destination and take out your notebook and answer the following questions:

1. Who are three people outside of your organization who know more about your destination than you?
2. How are you going to capture that knowledge?

### **CASE STUDY: GO ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS**



Go Rockford was keenly aware of residents’ perception of how the destination was being presented to visitors. Rockford’s extensive cultural history was overlooked due to its successful industrial development, as well as development in other industries such as aerospace, healthcare and automotive.

This created a feeling that the city was not visibly appealing, and therefore they found that there was not enough of a draw for visitors. The Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau (RACVB), operating as Go Rockford, then took it upon themselves to understand the true perception of their own city on behalf of their residents and how they could create a destination that is not only enticing to tourists, but also to their own community.

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***“With awareness comes responsibility and choice.”***

**– Amanda Lindhout**  
*Canadian Humanitarian*

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In 2012, the RACVB created a survey in order to gain feedback on organization and destination facilities from their local community. According to John Groh, the President and CEO of RACVB, the reason behind receiving this feedback was so they could better understand how their residents wished to be presented and perceived to visitors.

The survey aimed to understand “public opinions about local tourism, quality of life, public safety, culture, sense of community and more” (2017 RACVB Report). By including the community so closely in these efforts, the RACVB has seen more engagement in tourism efforts, an improvement in visitor sentiments towards the downtown area and has provided more business opportunities within the area.

The organization has now done three surveys (in 2012, 2015 and 2017) with the hope that they can understand their residents’ needs continuously and can continue to address them.

In the “Awareness” section of the report, they can identify key demographic and geographical

information to better understand which populations and locations are in more need of particular amenities and have similar opinions.

In the tourism-focused section, respondents were able to rank various initiatives and sites and give insight and feedback into what they would like to see more of. Sports tourism ranked high, as well as the beautification of downtown Rockford. With more promotion for outdoor recreation, downtown revitalization, park redevelopment and artwork installations being seen as necessary steps for the RACVB to take, the organization has been able to act on these opinions and create a far more aesthetically pleasing downtown for residents and visitors alike to enjoy. These tourism-centric projects and initiatives are also attractive for the everyday resident to enjoy, as well as tourists.

The RACVB has also been able to increase awareness of their residents and its stories through multiple marketing campaigns and series. Through their “Our City, Our Story” campaign, they partnered with a local artist, and were able to interview local business owners and residents to share their personal stories of Rockford, Illinois.

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***“Awareness without action is worthless.”***

**– Phil McGraw**  
*American Television Personality*

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, they also released a call to action for their residents to participate in a song-writing competition. A huge collection of artists, both professional and novice, submitted songs about all kinds of aspects of life. The winner was able to make their own music video and was used in Go Rockford’s promotional material.

All these projects and initiatives have allowed the community of Rockford to get involved in tourism efforts, and therefore enhance their own quality of life. As John Groh stated, “what’s good for our community is good for our visitors.”

### **About Go Rockford (Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau)**

The Rockford Region, including the surrounding metro area are located within Winnebago County, there are several unique surrounding villages and cities that form the Rockford Region, each with its own history, restaurants, and attractions. The Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau (RACVB), also known as Go Rockford, is a private, non-profit organization established in 1984 to promote and champion efforts to make the Rockford Region an overnight visitor destination. The mission of

The mission statement is “the Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau drives quality of life and economic growth for our citizens through tourism marketing and destination development.” They state their external role as “the RACVB adds wealth to the region’s economy by growing tourism.”

They list their priority results are as follows

- Create Economic Wealth: The Rockford Region experiences growth in tourism’s leading indicators.
- Enhance Tourism Product: The Rockford Region offers unique and marketable experiences and venues that meet or exceed visitor expectations and enhance quality of life for citizens.
- Engage Constituents On Behalf Of Tourism: RACVB tourism marketing and destination development efforts have broad support among key stakeholders.

## **AWARENESS EXERCISE #3**



Think about your community, your destination and take out your notebook and answer the following questions:

1. How do you capture resident sentiment?
2. What are your sources for information and news about your destination?
3. What projects or initiatives have come out of this knowledge?

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES**

- [Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau](#)
- [Destinations International Blog - The Value of Awareness](#)



## CHAPTER 6

# THE VALUE OF TRANSPARENCY

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*Destination Transparency is all about being proactively open to stakeholder and public scrutiny.*

*We gladly inform our stakeholders and the community about what we do, how we operate and our return on investment. This means that in addition to sharing our successes and victories, we also share when we have fallen short or failed. We seek to be responsible and accountable without any prompting or prodding.*

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As we have often said, destination promotion is unique in that it involves the use of other people's resources, promoting other people's property or assets and using an impression, a concept, an idea known as a brand that represents the community as a whole and, therefore, is really owned by everyone who resides and makes up that community. Each one of those pieces has a fiduciary responsibility.

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***“A lack of transparency results in distrust and a deep sense of insecurity.”***

**– Dalai Lama**  
*Tibetan Spiritual and Political Leader, Author*

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This fiduciary responsibility carries with it a duty of care that means a destination organization owes the community the commitment to exercise reasonable care when they make decisions as a steward of the destination's brand. It also carries a duty of loyalty, of faithfulness that the destination organization will act in the best interests of the destination when articulating the brand and promoting it. Finally, it carries a duty of obedience which requires the destination organization to be faithful to the destination and the mission to benefit the community as a whole and individually. A destination organization must have the public's trust that the organization will manage funds

and resources responsibly, represent the community assets honestly and fairly, and develop, articulate and promote the destination's brand for the betterment of the community.

To do this, a destination organization must achieve that trust by being proactively open, responsible and honest. A destination organization must be transparent.

Simply put, destination transparency is all about inviting public scrutiny. A destination organization should gladly inform their stakeholders and the community about what they do, how they operate and the return on investment they achieve. This means that in addition to sharing their successes and victories, they also share when they have fallen short or failed. The destination organization should seek to be responsible and accountable without any prompting or prodding.

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***“We believe that transparency is needed to create trust, and it’s also needed to create a dialogue.”***

**– Julie Sweet**  
*CEO, Accenture*

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## **TRANSPARENCY EXERCISE #1**

Think about your community, your destination and take out your notebook and answer the following questions:

1. What information about or by the organization do you always share with the public?
2. What are the means for sharing? Website? Press Release? Open meeting? Other?



## **CASE STUDY: VISIT COLORADO SPRINGS**



After analyzing multiple destination organizations' websites, we noticed that many organizations were following the same pattern. Little or no information on what the Destination Organization was. You might find an "About Us" or a mission statement. Perhaps some annual reports. But very little information overall.

However, one destination organization, in particular, was an excellent example of transparency by having everything available on their website. Colorado Springs has a wide variety of information available for public inspection. This included staff bios, board bios, mission and vision statements, strategic plan, board meeting minutes, board bylaws, US 990 tax forms, performance indicators, annual reports and published annual budget.

### **About Visit Colorado Springs**

Visit Colorado Springs was founded in 1980 as a private non-profit corporation to promote tourism in Colorado Springs and the Pikes Peak region as a tourist destination throughout the whole year. The organization is controlled and guided by a board of directors and various committees.

The mission of Visit Colorado Springs is to bring more visitors to the Pikes Peak Region by promoting the city and region to leisure travelers as well as meeting and event planners. They do this through advertising, online marketing, PR, social media, direct sales and trade shows.

## Why Be So Transparent?

Colorado Springs is a non-profit organization run by a board of directors of local stakeholders. Upwards of 90 percent of their funding comes from city lodging and auto-rental tax. Understanding their very public nature, they decided to be as transparent as possible about what the organization is doing with public funds, why they are accredited, how they operate and other information.

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***“We have nothing to hide.”***

**- Doug Price**  
*CEO, Visit Colorado Springs*

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Visit Colorado Springs believes that since the funding is coming from public funds, then there should be no problem with sharing any information with the public. The only thing they are not proactively sharing publicly is their marketing plan to maintain their competitive advantage. As President and CEO Doug Price says, “We have nothing to hide.”

Recently, like all destination organizations, they were truly challenged by the COVID-19 global pandemic. Colorado Springs businesses shut down and traveling to or from the destination was non-existent. The destination organization did not lose its commitment to transparency. Their website became a hub of information related to the pandemic — whether good news or bad — everything was there. Visit Colorado Springs made sure that information was up to date and frequently updated. To ensure accuracy and engagement, key items were shared with their board of directors, finance committee and membership committee before going up on the website.

While the Visit Colorado Springs transparency page of their website is a model for others, it is the daily practice of transparency that has earned trust from their community.

## TRANSPARENCY EXERCISE #2



Think about your community, your destination and take out your notebook and answer the following questions:

1. Does your website have an About Us page? Does it tell your organization's story?
2. Does your website have annual reports and business or strategic plans?
3. Does your website have ways for residents to contact you?
4. Does your website have bios of your board of directors and staff? Do these bios contain information about community involvement by the individuals?

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

- [Visit Colorado Springs](#)
- [Visit Colorado Springs Transparency Page](#)

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***“A team is a group of people who trust each other.”***

**- Simon Sinek**  
*Author*

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## CHAPTER 7

# THE VALUE OF INCLUSIVENESS

*Destination Inclusiveness means not excluding any area or neighborhood of our destination, any group or segment of people within our destination, or any history, culture or tradition.*

*We welcome all into the fold. No one is turned away. We always strive to find ways to bring new people, new perspectives and new ideas into our universe and, through this, develop a clear, honest and positive image of the destination's brand that reflects everyone within our community.*

*And we welcome visitors in the same spirit.*

A destination organization must have the trust of its destination. To do this, it must be open, responsible and honest. This means that in addition to transparent the organization must be inclusive.

Destination inclusiveness means not excluding any area or neighborhood of your destination, any group or segment of people within your destination, or any history, culture, or tradition. You should welcome all into the fold. No one should be turned away. A destination organization should always strive to find ways to bring new people, new perspectives and

new ideas into their universe and, through this, develop a clear, honest and positive image of the destination's brand that reflects everyone within the community.

Through this, the destination organization will be part of the community. It will be understood. It will be respected. Then and only then will it be able to move forward.

### **EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**

Destinations International recognizes and advocates the importance of cultivating a

unified travel industry where everyone is welcome, where there is equitable access for all. We will help reshape existing power structures so that systemically marginalized voices and perspectives are heard and valued.

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***“Diversity: the art of thinking independently together.”***

**– Malcolm Forbes**  
*American Entrepreneur and Publisher*

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We recognize the importance of cultivating a tourism industry that represents a wide variety of individuals at all levels, celebrating the broad range of human differences among us while embracing the commonalities we share.

Finally, we are committed to transforming destination communities through thought leadership, best practices and tools based on equity, diversity and inclusion principles through an anti-racist lens that empowers our members so their destinations are true reflections of their communities.

Through meaningful collaboration, Destinations International will lead and engage strategic planning and programmatic development initiatives and opportunities to enable structural social change for the benefit of our member’s communities focused on five core priorities: self-awareness and personal investment; education and awareness; community engagement; workforce development; and branding and promotion.

### **DESTINATIONS INTERNATIONAL’S FIVE CORE PRIORITIES OF THE EDI STRATEGY ROADMAP**

#### **Self-Awareness & Personal Investment:**

Industry professionals must acknowledge their role as fundamental change makers in defining success for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and commit to doing the work first before asking

the same of others. Destinations International will work to facilitate peer-to-peer engagement to have these tough but critical conversations to drive leadership commitment, board diversity and executive mentorship.

**Education & Awareness:** We are part of a highly collaborative and engaged community that leverages the benefits of cooperative learning and shared growth. Destinations International is committed to having open, honest conversations by sharing knowledge to build EDI best practices and collecting metrics to measure action and progress. Destination organizations must be deeply connected to the communities that make up their destinations and be committed to nurturing broader cultural and institutional change. Destinations International will work to support best practices and thought leadership to help drive equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives in communities to demonstrate how our industry can enrich the lives of those living in our destinations.

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***“When we listen and celebrate what is both common and different, we become wiser, more inclusive and better as an organization.”***

**– Pat Wadors**  
*Chief Talent Officer at ServiceNow*

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**Community Engagement:** Destination organizations must be deeply connected to the communities that make up their destinations and be committed to nurturing broader cultural and institutional change. Destinations International will work to support best practices and thought leadership to help drive equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives in communities to demonstrate how our industry can enrich the lives of those living in our destinations.

**Workforce Development:** We recognize how critical inclusivity is to foster innovation and bring together a wide variety of voices when promoting tourism and sustaining our economies. Destinations International will work to encourage industry executive leadership and boards to grow an inclusive and equitable workforce that reflects the level of diversity we wish to welcome to our destinations.

**Branding & Promotion:** We firmly believe in the transformative power of travel and are dedicated to including those the industry has historically ignored. Destinations International will work to establish industry standards to push towards inclusive and equitable marketing practices that are essential to tourism marketing and destination brand stewardship.

For more in-depth information on this important initiative, please visit the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion section of the Destinations International website.



### INCLUSIVENESS EXERCISE #1

Think about your community, your destination and take out your notebook and answer the following questions:

1. Has your organization taken the Destinations International Equity, Diversity & Inclusion CEO Pledge?
2. Has your organization enrolled in the Destinations International Equity, Diversity & Inclusion CEO Masterclass?
3. Has your organization provided EDI training for your internal staff?
4. How has your organization led in education efforts with your stakeholders, members and broader community?

## BEING INCLUSIVE IN WELCOMING VISITORS

The commitment to EDI looks both inward to our community and outward to our visitors. The following two case studies address destinations developing specific outreach to two specific communities with a history of being excluded. In both cases, it required a commitment by the community as a whole and not just the destination organization.



### CASE STUDY: VISIT MESA



Visit Mesa became the first autism-certified city in the world. This bold initiative is a proud expression of the inclusiveness inherent to Mesa. It demonstrates the powerful impact and results of an entire city coming together to make all visitors feel welcome, especially by accommodating the country's autistic travelers.

The idea was originated and spearheaded by the team at Visit Mesa. The efforts began as a local hospitality campaign and quickly evolved into a community-wide initiative. The successful initiative involved municipal departments, local businesses, residents and the office of Mayor John Giles.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) affects a significant number of people and is at a 600 percent increase year after year, according to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. Research shows that one in 54 people today are on the spectrum, and thus travel becomes worrisome for their families. By gaining

recognition as the first “Autism Certified City,” Visit Mesa could tap into a market with 32 million annual travelers who spend more than \$262 billion on autism-related services in the U.S. each year, according to International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES).

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***“Inclusion is both good practice and good business.”***

**– Marc Garcia**  
*CEO, Visit Mesa*

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After getting their own staff and board-certified, Visit Mesa worked on getting hospitality partners through the autism certification training. Following their lead, the Mesa Chamber of Commerce, Mesa Parks and Recreation Department and Mesa Police Department also committed to the training. Visit Mesa was deemed the first destination organization to become a “Certified Autism Center” in the United States.

A minimum of 58 Mesa partner businesses were required to register for IBCCES autism training for a citywide IBCCES certification. To date, 60 organizations within the hospitality industry, the City of Mesa and regional communities have committed to the Autism Certification, representing nearly 4,000 employees completing certification and more organizations looking to join the movement.

The overall campaign resulted in 334 media articles making 180 million impressions in both print and online. In addition, two conferences have been booked in Mesa as a direct result of the initiative, each resulting in 100+ room-night bookings.

Visit Mesa explained that there is a major difference between being autism-friendly and autism certified. In the certification process,

the properties get audited after spending a few hours with the certifiers. After that, a report is made offering recommendations on how they can better serve autistic travelers, for example, adjust the lighting or sound. This makes travel planning easier and enhances the overall travel experience.

The certified properties also have sensory guides which include all the details about the property and activities, specifically focusing on the exact ways and intensity with which it might impact the different senses.

Recently, Visit Mesa established the “Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program” in the city. This initiative is a simple way for visitors and residents to self-identify they have a disability that might require a little extra help.

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***“It’s part of our overall initiative to just be more inclusive to everyone, regardless of how they come to us.”***

**– Allison Brooks**  
*The City of Mesa*

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The program uses easy-to-identify lanyards and bracelets that are available at the numerous locations on a complimentary basis to those who simply ask for them.

Not all disabilities are visible — some are hidden and not immediately obvious, such as learning difficulties, mental health, mobility, speech, visual or hearing impairments. Living with a hidden disability can make daily life more demanding for many people, but it can be difficult for others to identify, acknowledge or understand the challenges that are faced.

These initiatives are a great example of being inclusive for residents and visitors alike.

## About Visit Mesa

Mesa, Arizona is a boundless destination surrounded by the natural Sonoran Desert beauty of Tonto National Forest and the communities of Apache Junction, and Queen Creek. This regional recreation playground boasts an assortment of lifestyle and leisure pursuits for visitors. With countless places for new discoveries, competitive sports, wild west adventures and farm to table cuisine, Mesa is a city that knows no bounds. From urban to rural, mountain peak to desert floor, arts and culture to wildlife and nightlife, each and every guest is given unparalleled access to one of the richest arrays of visitor offerings in the country. A geographic wonderland, Mesa is close to the Tonto National Forest and the iconic Superstition Mountains, but far enough to experience the wide-open and true Arizona vacation. From here, all things are possible, leaving you breathless and sure to show you why we are “City Limitless.” The vision of Visit Mesa is “Elevate Mesa as a must experience destination in Arizona.” Their mission statement is “Promote the value and vitality of our visitor economy to create a better community.”



### CASE STUDY: VISIT RALEIGH

Visit Raleigh has taken deliberate efforts to include and support the LGBTQ community. Some of their best practices include maintaining diverse and inclusive policies, meeting the local LGBTQ community and becoming aware of the many assets that

exist. Visit Raleigh has also invested in the local community through the LGBT Center for Raleigh. They have made a point of listing TAG-approved hotels. Furthermore, they have dedicated staff, time and resources to this market segment. They have also committed to annual long-term marketing plans focused on the LGBTQ audience and regularly discuss those plans with their area hospitality partners.

The LGBT Center of Raleigh empowers the LGBT community and allies to help themselves and others through education and socialization. It offers a variety of programs, services and social opportunities such as First Friday Art Walk, Youth, SAGE Raleigh, Raleigh Allies, Trans\* Initiative and Women's Initiative. They also invest in LGBT-friendly merchandise like gay-themed T-shirts, accessories, artworks and gay clubs. It has also been the proud provider of nightlife for the annual North Carolina Pride Festival for many years.

In 2016, The North Carolina government enacted the infamous HB2, better known as “the bathroom bill,” that created a stir because of its anti-LGBTQ clauses. The enactment of the law led to a high-profile travel boycott. But Visit Raleigh rose to the occasion and reinforced its commitment to welcoming LGBTQ markets.

They designed a thoughtful and inclusive approach to tackle this sensitive situation in a responsible way. Their promotional campaign with the creative tagline “All Are Welcome” and “Y’all Means All” displayed their support to the LGBT community by taking a clear stand.

One lesson learned — evaluating and updating the advertising and promotions based on the foundations laid by the destination organization proved to be extremely beneficial in navigating through the controversy.

In his presentation at Destinations International Annual Convention 2019, Jonathan Freeze, Visit Raleigh” Director of Marketing and Communications, shared tips for other destinations if they found themselves in a similar situation. He mentioned that it is very important for destination organizations to have LGBTQ marketing conversations with board members and elected officials. Jonathan specifically emphasized not just discussing “LGB” but also “T” and “Q” and train the organization’s partners accordingly. He said that destination organizations must also consider TAG-approved hotel/venue inventory and evaluate online feedback mechanisms. The most important of all was to have an advocacy strategy and response plan.

### **About Visit Raleigh**

It is more than a trip to a blossoming Southern metropolis—you will feel enriched and energized the instant you’re warmly welcomed by its smart, savvy locals. Raleigh’s bright minds head top-tier technology, education and life science institutions; its artists create a bevy of cultural and culinary touchstones; and its storytellers proudly carry on the collective heritage of a rich, historic capital city. Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau (Visit Raleigh) is the official destination marketing organization for Wake County and is responsible for promoting Wake County as an attractive travel destination and enhancing its public image as a dynamic place to live and work. Through the impact of travel, the organization strengthens the economic position of and provide opportunity for people throughout Wake County. Raleigh, N.C./Wake County welcomes nearly 18 million visitors annually.

## **INCLUSIVENESS EXERCISE #2**



Think about your community, your destination and take out your notebook and answer the following questions:

1. What actions has your community taken to welcome people with disabilities?
2. What actions has your community taken to welcome people from traditionally marginalized groups?
3. How would you improve on these actions? How would you involve the community?

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES**

- [Destinations International’s Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Efforts](#)
- [Visit Mesa](#)
- [Visit Raleigh](#)



## CHAPTER 8

# THE VALUE OF ENGAGEMENT

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*Destination Engagement is the process of informing and listening to groups of people within our destination to address issues affecting the wellbeing of the community and promotion of the destination.*

*We treat our residents as our first customers. They are our front-line destination ambassadors, advocates and beneficiaries of the destination promotion of our community. We treat our visitors as the valued guests they are. They provide critical resources as well as sparks of excitement and inspiration.*

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Simply put, engagement is active participation in your community and being invested in what happens in your community. According to Thomas Ehrlich of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, “Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and nonpolitical processes.”

Destination Engagement is a subgroup of civic engagement. The value is focused on making a

difference in our community through the power of travel. We define this engagement as the process of informing and listening to groups of people within our destination to address issues affecting the wellbeing of the community and promotion of the destination.

We value our residents and treat them as our first customer. They are our front-line destination ambassadors, advocates and beneficiaries of the destination promotion of our community. They are the foundation of our destination brand and help us build quality of place.

We treat our visitors as the valued guests they are. They provide critical resources that improve our community as well as providing sparks of excitement and inspiration that improve our quality of life.

Because we never assume residents understand the value of destination promotion and what we do as leaders in this area, we create regular and ongoing interaction with our residents. And because our residents and the community they form are at the heart of the destination brand, we listen as much, if not more, than inform. And we find a way of collecting and measuring sentiment, opinions, interaction and ideas of both visitors and residents so that we can adapt our messaging, marketing and other promotional efforts to support our destination, our community.

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***“Not to engage in the pursuit of ideas is to live like ants instead of like men.”***

**– Mortimer Adler**  
*American Philosopher, Educator, and Author*

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By considering residents from the very first moment, by engaging them along the whole process of destination promotion, you reduce the risk of surprises later in the process. But just as important, you also make your residents feel that they influence the promotional decisions that are being executed on their behalf, and that you listen to their concerns and that with you, they share ownership of the efforts. Engaging with residents provides an excellent opportunity to not only build trust with your community but develop a better promotional and sales effort and a true reflection of your community in the destination brand.

A few things to take into consideration in developing your engagement. First, there must be reciprocity, a mutually beneficial exchange of information, resources and understanding.

Consider the expertise and experience that exists in the members of the community in the design, facilitation and evaluation of promotional initiatives and strategic planning efforts. Consider seeking to do promotion with the community rather than to do it for the community.

Second, you most likely will need to educate people as part of this effort. Remember that residents may not fully understand the value of destination promotion, the impact of travel and what destination organizations do as the leader in this area. Engagement should consider the attitudes, skills and knowledge level of the community members you are engaging with.

Third, remember to be transparent and inclusive. Destination promotion is unique in that it involves the use of other people's resources, promoting other people's property or assets and using an impression, a concept, an idea known as a brand that represents the community as a whole and, therefore, is really owned by everyone who resides and makes up that community. This involves trust, which is earned first by being transparent and inclusive.

As part of this, show respect for diversity, broadly and inclusively defined, in all your engagement. Actively challenge any biases, stereotypes and assumptions regarding the community. Seek out and respect other experiences, other histories. Acknowledge and explore any differences in culture between segments within the community, including differences in identity, experience and/or culture.

Fourth, take time for reflection and evaluation. Intentionally incorporate opportunities for reflection before, during and after engagement. Involve community stakeholders in reflection whenever possible. And include opportunities to gather feedback from participants and stakeholders to assess value and impact and inform future projects.

Finally, remember to listen! Engage the community with a listening and learning attitude that is mindful of the community's needs, assets and interests. View engagement as a valuable learning opportunity that expands your understanding of the destination.

Operating in a way that is routinely making sure you allow the community the opportunities to share and contribute thoughts and ideas may be more time-consuming, but it will make your destination promotion efforts stronger and your organization more stable.



### ENGAGEMENT EXERCISE #1

Think about your community, your destination and take out your notebook and answer the following questions:

1. How often does your organization reach out to residents proactively?
2. What are the communication vehicles used?
3. Would you consider these communications a two-way conversation or merely pushing out news?
4. If a two-way conversation, reflect and identify what have you learned from the community that has improved the way your organization conducts its mission. Can you list them?



### CASE STUDY: GREATER MIAMI CONVENTION & VISITOR BUREAU

For destination organizations, good engagement not only builds trust but also

assists with managing crises such as the recent Covid-19 pandemic.

As in many destinations, some residents in Miami do not have a good understanding of the value of the travel industry and the value of a destination organization in supporting the industry.

A further complication for GMCVB is that there are 34 different cities within the county. Each has its own mayor and its own elected commissioners and officials. That makes the outreach efforts extra challenging because they must make sure that they connect with all these different municipalities.

For a first action to help address these, in 2020, GMCVB created a tourism top facts infographic for government officials and community leaders to understand the place of Miami's tourism in the local economy. The sheet highlights all the efforts that the organization has been doing as a destination organization for the community. The sheet highlights the economic impact that tourism brings, the taxes it generates, the fact that it improves the overall quality of life. It also presents the info in terms of savings for taxpayers (because otherwise, these are taxes that the residents would have to pay to maintain that same quality of life).

The second step was more immersive into the community. Every five years, the Greater Miami Convention & Visitor Bureau (GMCVB), as the official, accredited destination sales and marketing organization for Miami Dade County, goes through a deliberate strategic planning process. In 2020, they completed their most recent five years strategic plan, which was the most comprehensive and community-wide strategic plan that the organization has ever done in the history of its 30 years.

The plan was created through an extensive engagement process, including the following.

- Over 85 one-on-one interviews with industry and government leaders
- 2 meetings and workshops with board and GMCVB management
- 1 visioning workshop
- 15 town hall meetings throughout Miami Dade County
- 4 focus group sessions
- 8 facilitation sessions with specific segments of the industry and community
- 1 survey for meeting planners and tour operators
- 4 DestinationNEXT assessment sessions

Since Miami is a diverse city, where almost 60 percent of residents speak Spanish, or Haitian Creole, the organization wanted this strategic plan to not only be a plan for themselves but a plan for every part of the community. In response the strategic plan was published in multiple languages, including English, Spanish and Haitian Creole. This was the first time GMCVB had ever done this.

Currently, one of the top priorities for the GMCVB is engagement. In the past, the organization spent most of its time and energy focusing, communicating and engaging with visitors, meeting planners and others. But for the organization to remain relevant in the community, they needed to rethink the way that they are investing in local community engagement. The idea was to spend more time, energy and resources being proactive. They needed to get out of a defensive position and lean into their role in the community and do so on a systematic basis.

Their most recent strategic plan emphasizes how much more work they need to do in the community. While they remain responsible for promoting tourism, meetings and conventions, now more than ever, they must balance that

against the resident quality of life. They need to better communicate the importance of their efforts and what it means to the residents in their community. Therefore, over the past year, GMCVB has begun working much more intimately with local stakeholder groups. Today they are looking to add additional resources internally dedicated to community engagement.

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***“It’s going to require a lot of time, money, and hiring people that are 100% dedicated to engagement through community and government relations, but instead of looking it as an expense, we look it as an investment in ourselves.”***

**– Rolando Aedo**  
GMCVB Chief Operating Officer

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The impact of engagement is undeniable, and it became one of the most important factors in the overall destination organization’s success. Good community engagement not only builds more sustainable, long-term relationships with residents, government partners and stakeholders but it also enhances the organization’s resilience and relevance. “It’s going to require a lot of time, money, and hiring people that are 100% dedicated to engagement through community and government relations, but instead of looking at it as an expense, we look at it as an investment in ourselves,” said GMCVB Chief Operating Officer, Rolando Aedo.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, when tourism started to shut down in March 2020, GMCVB immediately transitioned from a sales and marketing company to a support institution to help their hotels, restaurants and residents. They created multiple programs for their tourism recovery efforts, including Miami Shines, Miami Eats and Miami Land.

The Miami Shines program is a tourism recovery marketing campaign that aims to promote responsible travel to Greater Miami and the Beaches. The campaign was divided into a pre-recovery and a recovery phase supported by strategic advertising, social media and public relations. As part of the campaign, GMCVB also created the “Miamians Who Shine” video project, which featured individuals who have gone above and beyond to help the community during the Covid-19 pandemic.

While most of the restaurants were closed, many of them were still able to do take-out and delivery.

Therefore, GMCVB created the award-winning Miami Eats program to help more than 1300 restaurants and their employees to survive in these special times. The program is completely free and open to all restaurants in Miami Dade county.

Because of the pandemic, people are now looking for open outdoor experiences more than ever. As a result, GMCVB also put a lot of effort into the Miami Land program. The Miami Land program was specifically designed to showcase Miami’s great outdoors, open spaces, national parks, etc. The program was supported by partnerships with social media influencers, billboard placements, paid search and the initiative received extremely high engagement.

The organization also worked closely with their county government and chief medical officers regarding all the protocols and regulations and provided information about all the guidelines for travel to Miami on their “Destination Pledge” page, including a video that talks about the commitment that GMCVB as a community had made, from the airport to hotels, restaurants, attractions, etc.

## About The Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau

While many people come to Greater Miami for its world-renowned hotels, restaurants and nightlife – and, of course, its spectacular beaches – you’ll find that this beautiful destination is home to all of this plus a range of other exciting activities.

The Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau is the official, accredited destination sales and marketing organization for Miami Dade County. Their vision statement is “A global leisure and business destination that delivers culturally rich, diverse, and innovative experiences inspiring boundless passion in visitors and residents alike.” Their mission statement is “To Generate travel demand to Greater Miami and the Beaches to maximize economic impact to our community, ensure industry resiliency, and elevate the resident quality of life.”

### ENGAGEMENT EXERCISE #2



Think about your community, your destination and take out your notebook and answer the following questions:

1. How much community involvement is there in your strategic planning process?
2. Have you ever used town hall meetings as part of the process or as a separate information-gathering exercise?
3. Have you used a tool like the DestinationNEXT Assessments and Planning sessions to elicit stakeholder and community input?
4. What community-specific or focused initiatives has your organization launched to support your industry partners?

5. What specific COVID-19 related programs have you launched that will have life after the pandemic has subsided?

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES**

- [Greater Miami Convention Visitor Bureau](#)
- [About GMCVB](#)
- [GMCVB Strategic Plan Home](#)
- [DestinationNEXT Futures Study](#)
- [Destination Assessments and Planning \(DNEXT\)](#)



## CHAPTER 9

# DESTINATION COLLABORATION

*Destination Collaboration is the action of working with stakeholders to produce or create something within a destination.*

*Effective collaboration contributes to our success. We work together with our customers, members, clients, suppliers and community stakeholders to reach our goals. We seek to empower these people with better sharing of information to improve our capacity to solve key problems, which ultimately leads to new innovations and approaches.*

As its Latin roots of “com” and “laborare” suggest, collaboration reduced to its simplest definition means “to work together.” Destination Collaboration is the action of working with someone to produce or create something.

When we think of collaboration with the community, we identify, engage and work with communities of place (a physical or geographic space like a neighborhood), communities of identity (a group of people tied to each other through social characteristics) and communities of interest (a group of people tied to each other by an issue or goal)

within our destination. Such collaborations in key areas such as strategic planning, brand development and marketing/sales efforts can mutually benefit the community while fulfilling the destination organization’s mission. It can also lay the groundwork for longer-term conversations around issues like funding and destination stewardship.

Through collaborations, destination organizations can create broad-based, local coalitions to help advance, develop and sustain the destination organization and its goals. The purpose of such coalitions is to develop and promote the destination organization’s vision,

mobilize resources, ensure accountability, keep the community informed, nurture partnerships and relationships and build the capacity to sustain the effort.

There is a need to build sustainable community partnerships beyond just our traditional hospitality members. Too often, relationships between destination organizations and community partners are short-lived, existing only for the duration of a specific project or venture. Partners need to understand they must stay the course to achieve better results in destination promotion. Destination organizations, in turn, need to foster welcoming environments that make their partners want to stay involved. With long-term, committed community partnerships in place, built upon a collaborative relationship, it becomes easier to tap into a range of grassroots support and possible funding opportunities. It is easier because everyone has developed an attitude that says, “We’re in this together.”

***“To go fast, go alone. To go far, go together.”***

**– African Proverb**

When a destination organization engages in a productive collaboration, those partners may become important advocates for additional resources for the destination organization. This is especially important given the present constraints on and cutbacks in public and private funding for destination promotion. The cross-sector leadership structures forged to support a community’s destination organization have the potential to serve as a new voice for necessary funding. Partners, forged through collaboration, should advocate for increased and stable financing of the programs and services needed by a destination organization.

But it all starts with collaboration.

## COLLABORATION EXERCISE #1



Think about your community, your destination and take out your notebook and answer the following questions:

1. How often does your organization pull together town halls or focus groups of residents to help problem-solve or request feedback on draft work?
2. If your organization was going through a rebranding exercise, who from the community would you want to collaborate with to improve the result?
3. If your organization were going through a meeting and/or convention sales strategy exercise, who from the community would you want to collaborate with to improve the result? Who could help open doors?
4. Make a list of ten non-hospitality community leaders you would like to brainstorm with about your destination organization, your community and the future of both.



### CASE STUDY: HAPPY VALLEY ADVENTURE BUREAU



The Happy Valley Adventure Bureau is a prime example of adopting a collaborative approach with a variety of stakeholders for planning, marketing, strategy and decision-making. One example of this is a county-wide agritourism promotion campaign initiative that showcases and supports Centre County’s

agricultural offerings. This collaboration with the Chamber of Business & Industry of Centre County involved a group of key area stakeholders and a project advisory committee. It was a collaborative effort to combine two major industries in the region. “We launched this initiative as a way to marry two of Centre County’s largest industries — agriculture and tourism — in order to help them both grow,” said Fritz Smith, Happy Valley Adventure Bureau President and CEO. “We saw an opportunity to embrace agritourism in a more thorough and robust way than other destinations have done, and to distinguish ourselves as a destination of choice for those wanting authentic ag-related experiences.”

Together the two groups worked to get all the places and venues in the county that offer agricultural experiences, like a farm, farm-to-table restaurant or a place that grows, produces and distributes food, together to market them holistically. They were determined not to leave these small businesses all on their own with very limited resources to market themselves. According to Chamber of Business & Industry of Centre County President and CEO Vern Squier, the productive relationship with the Happy Valley Adventure Bureau, and creative vision from local talent, is enabling both groups to promote the county’s vibrant and strong agritourism opportunities to local and external audiences in an impactful and memorable way.

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***“When you need to innovate, you need collaboration.”***

**– Marissa Mayer**  
*American Business Leader and Investor*

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Other collaborations were driven by Happy Valley Adventure Bureau, observing that visitors to the county would usually attend a single event like a concert or a sporting event

at one location, stay for one night and then go back home. The bureau saw an opportunity to extend stays by visitors beyond one night. To do this, they set about expanding their collaboration with as many businesses and organizations in the county as possible. Their goal was to highlight the many interesting sites in the Valley and tell their stories. The bureau wanted to get visitors exploring throughout the county and learn all the different facets of the area.

One of the successful collaborations was with the community of Bellefonte, Pennsylvania. Bellefonte, the county seat of Centre County, is a small but growing community tucked between the Appalachian Mountains and the rolling farmland that make Central Pennsylvania a natural wonderland. The town is steeped in American history and small-town charm. The bureau started a collaboration with two organizations. The first was the Bellefonte Intervalley Area Chamber of Commerce which represents all areas of business and industry, service and tourism, as well as individuals located throughout Centre County. The second organization was Downtown Bellefonte Inc. which is dedicated to helping businesses arrive and thrive in Bellefonte while preserving, protecting and utilizing Bellefonte’s historical architecture and heritage. They organize town-wide initiatives that invite residents and visitors alike to discover all that Bellefonte has to offer. The collaboration of the three organizations gave the bureau the ability to have eyes and ears in Bellefonte, allowing the bureau to promote the town not just generally but also in specific detail with special attention to highlighting special events and initiatives. It also amplified the messages by pushing them out through the channels of all three organizations.

Based on this success, the bureau took special efforts to identify economic development

agencies and chambers of commerce throughout the county to partner with in promoting what was happening in the various communities throughout the valley. These collaborations positioned the bureau to handle the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic, and they were looked at to lead many of the efforts.



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***“It became painfully evident as we rolled in to COVID, that we were being looked upon to come up with ideas, to come up with things to do, to lead.”***

**– Dave Gerdes**  
*VP, Happy Valley Adventure Bureau*

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The bureau, like many in the industry, anticipated that the hospitality industry was going to be hard hit. The slowdown in travel was further complicated by the mandates and protocols placed on hotels, restaurants, etc. The bureau quickly identified that they had to do something to help the hotels, restaurants and other local businesses. As the holiday season approached, they knew that foot traffic was going to be down and wanted to help the small, local businesses make online sales. Hence, they worked together as a team to develop the Helping Happy Valley LIVE site that supported the different initiatives.

Happy Valley created a takeout trail to promote restaurant takeout, as the limited capacities and seating were hurting the restaurant

business. Takeout trail passport features included benefits such as get takeout from ten restaurants and be entered to win a \$100 gift card or other prizes.

“It became painfully evident as we rolled in to COVID, that we were being looked upon to come up with ideas, to come up with things to do, to lead. We stepped up, we rightfully took it by the horns, we established committees for hotel, sports, marketing, tasting trail and B&B. We became very involved in certain organizations in Bellefonte, State College (home of Penn State University) and other small communities throughout the county. We were taking collaborative efforts and we were being tapped on the shoulder to make that first move to show the initiative. We did our best to get our community through covid,” said Dave Gerdes, the bureau’s Vice President of Sales.

Lesley Kistner, Happy Valley Adventure Bureau’s Director of Public Affairs, pointed out that the timing of their marketing messaging was crucial, but so was the local resident’s expectations. They wanted to make sure to convey community expectations for visitors that might come here. Lesley said, “So, it was important for us to show visitors that they could visit here safely at various times but also the expectations when they came here, of what the community expected of visitors.”

Part of the COVID-19 mandate was that they could not have fans attending large-scale sporting events. The area had relied heavily on attendees to Beaver Stadium at Penn State University. The stadium holds 107,000 people. Not having those fans coming in for the home football season was a huge blow. In response, the bureau was constantly strategizing and communicating with their constituents to figure out ways to help them. They spoke to elected officials, business owners, economic development experts, residents, etc. and

charted a course to bring everyone out stronger on the other side of the pandemic.

The greater Centre County community had not always collaborated as one region prior to the pandemic. The pandemic accelerated the collaboration that the bureau had already begun. Partners recognized that they were over-reliant on Penn State University as the major employer. But with no visitation, no football and no graduations, they started focusing on collaborating as one region, promoting every community, and focusing on a range of businesses throughout Centre County.

### **About Happy Valley Adventure Bureau**

The Happy Valley Adventure Bureau (HVAB) is a nonprofit, membership-based organization committed to the fundamental principal that meetings and visitors can be more effectively attracted to our area through “coordinated group action” rather than independent action. The bureau’s mission is to develop, promote and engage in travel-related activities and coordinate visitor services designed to enhance the economic activity and quality of life within Centre County, Pennsylvania. The Happy Valley Adventure Bureau is the official destination marketing organization (DMO) for Centre County, Pennsylvania. Like cities and towns worldwide, Happy Valley is promoted as a vacation and meeting destination to select target audiences. Your membership joins you to a network of business professionals who understand that travel and tourism are vital to the region’s overall wealth and economic strength.



### **COLLABORATION EXERCISE #2**

Think about your community, your destination and take out your notebook and answer the following questions:

1. Does your organization collaborate with other community-based organizations to work together on promotion efforts?
2. If so, what do you need that they provide? What do they need that you provide? If not, what do other organizations have that would help you do your work better?
3. Can you make a list of organizations you want to collaborate with? What is preventing that collaboration?
4. What organizations beyond your community could you collaborate with?
5. How would you build trust between organizations to have a successful collaboration? How would you settle on a mission for the collaboration? How would you define success?

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES**

- [Happy Valley Adventure Bureau](#)
- [Chamber of Business & Industry of Centre County President](#)
- [Downtown Bellefonte Inc.](#)
- [Helping Happy Valley LIVE site](#)



## CHAPTER 10

# DESTINATION INNOVATION

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*Destination Innovation means to make changes in something established, especially by introducing new destination promotion methods, ideas, or products.*

*We understand that while the organization's values are unchanging, the means to achieving them are not. We welcome new ideas and fresh perspectives. We embrace and use new technologies and platforms to tell our story.*

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We live in an era of astounding technological transformation in which change, not stability, has become the norm. All around us are now-familiar technologies whose very existence would have seemed extraordinary just a generation ago. From smartphones, handheld GPS units, and digital television to computers, the internet, and the World Wide Web—technology is everywhere and touching all of us in ever more pervasive ways. New forms of entertainment, commerce, research, work, building materials, and communication have been fueling the pace of change. They have created—and continue to create—a myriad of new opportunities but many, including economies and governments, are still having

a hard time adjusting to this new era quickly enough.

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***“Very simply put, innovation is about staying relevant.”***

**– Stephen Shapiro**  
*Author*

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Travel has been at the forefront of change. The cellphone has become the tour guide, travel agency, best restaurant locator, map, and more. The cellphone is by our side during the entire journey. The technology that brought us Siri and Alexa, the virtual assistants that meet all our needs (what is the weather like

today in my city, turn the radio on, open my email, and more) are now being used in hotels thanks to the arrival of virtual assistants that are specifically designed for this environment. Travel technology is becoming more powerful with help from 5G networks. They promise much faster loading and downloading speeds, wider coverage, and more stable connections. We can do more things and do them faster.



For destination organizations, the changes have resulted in more and better information. Looking at travelers and their amount of spend, the reason for the trip, and their country of origin and cross-checking this information with public data from public and private sources can develop extensive visitor profiles and achieve a higher marketing success rate. Better information means better segmentation for campaigns to increase their efficacy and optimize their investment. Personal data can make trip personalization easier and increase visitor satisfaction. The travel industry is one where interaction with the consumer is becoming more critical, and technological advances are letting us get closer and know our customers a bit better.

At the heart of this age of change is the growth in information technology. We are amid an information revolution that is every bit as profound as the two great technological revolutions of the past—the agricultural and industrial revolutions. We are in the Information Age. The Information Age has changed

technology, science, economies, culture, and even the way people think. The internet, arguably the most prominent innovation of the Information Age, has changed the way people do everything, such as how they seek information, shop, and are entertained. The Information Age has brought about many new inventions and innovations, including advances in communication with services like texting, email, and social media. The world has not been the same since.

Destination organizations have been, often out of necessity, very good at incorporating new technologies and innovative ideas in their promotional activities. But too often this has been in reaction to changes, driven by other innovations and aimed at the outside world. Too few cultivate and foster innovation internally—identifying a problem and innovating a solution. Even fewer have the residents of the community as the driver of these changes.

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***“Innovation is the fundamental way a company brings constant value to their customers, business, or life and consequently their shareholders and stakeholders.”***

**– Paul Hobcraft**  
*Innovation Consultant and Blogger*

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Many organizations make grand statements about their commitment to innovation but do not invest in the time, people, or money to foster innovative ideas. According to Jorge Barba, a partner at Blu Maya, an innovation consultancy specializing in helping ordinary companies become extraordinary, leaders that want to build an organization that innovates consistently must provide six things to employees: freedom, resources, diverse teams, support, encouragement, and challenge. In other words, you can put it like this: Have bold

goals, get out of the way, and reward people for trying.

Placing innovation into the core of the organization's thinking changes the conversations; it can alter the time horizons and it shifts the whole dynamics of where to go to grow and sustain the organization for the future.



### **COLLABORATION EXERCISE #1**

Think about your community / your destination and take out your notebook and answer the following questions:

1. What are the major innovations that have changed your organization in the last 10 years?
2. Have any of these innovations brought your organization and the community closer together? Made you more relevant to them? If so, how?
3. How does your organization foster innovation internally?
4. Does your organization provide your employees with freedom, resources, diverse teams, support, encouragement, and challenge?



### **CASE STUDY: DISCOVER LONG ISLAND**

Long Island, NY, USA was one of the hardest-hit destinations related to COVID-19—second only to New York City. The pandemic slowed down the travel landscape. Consumer fear

was widespread, and residents did not want to go out or, much less, invite people in. As the area's official tourism promotion agency, Discover Long Island had to look for other ways to engage with the community and find ways to share information with both residents and visitors on how they could travel safely. Addressing that need led to several new initiatives in 2020.

The first thing they did was to start the YouTube series: "Long Island TV." According to Kristen Jarnagin, the president and CEO of Discover Long Island, the reason for using the YouTube platform instead of a local TV station is that YouTube cannot only increase local brand awareness, but it also gives the organization the chance to reach global audiences. The new "Long Island TV" series takes viewers on a weekly road-trip adventure with Lili, their mobile visitor center. Lili is the innovative conversion of an iconic Long Island ice-cream truck that the organization purchased a couple of years ago and was supposed to go to major events around Long Island.

During the pandemic, when there were no events, Lili began to become a very expensive asset sitting un-utilized in the parking lot. The "Long Island TV" series made her an asset again to showcase road trips. The result was great as the show proved to be very popular. Discover Long Island's partners also loved the fact that the organization was taking the time, when they needed help the most, to showcase their businesses. To add a personal touch and underscore the importance of the partners, the CEO of Discover Long Island came personally to their businesses and interviewed them.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Discover Long Island kept close attention on the trends on their YouTube page. One of the things they noticed was that the videos were being used

for virtual learning. Teachers were looking for content to share with their students. To maximize their exposure through this use, Discover Long Island also created a channel on their YouTube page called Educational Resources. Currently, the channel has nine videos that deal with history, including the area's black history, the saving of the Montauk Lighthouse, the Culper Spy Ring, and more. The channel is proving to be extremely successful with one of the videos nearing 95,000 views.

Building off that success, Discover Long Island continues to pay close attention to where people are consuming content. One thing they noticed was that more than 50% of the United States population is listening to podcasts now. In November 2020, they launched their new destination-themed podcast: "Long Island Tea." It has proven to be a very inexpensive way to reach visitors and residents alike, and the organization can do it all in-house. The "Long Island Tea" podcast shares the best from the destination, including seasonal adventures, insider tips, and interviews with notable Long Islanders. The podcast became an ideal way to provide authentic storytelling. But more than that, it was produced in a way that brought the audience beyond tourism, exploring what it is like to live on Long Island and be a Long Islander.

Discover Long Island also launched two TikTok channels as another way to be where people are consuming content. Since they were such early adopters, they not only were able to get the account handle of Discover Long Island, but they also got Long Island New York as well. Currently, they have nearly 70,000 followers on the Long Island New York account, and almost 5,000 followers on Discover Long Island account.

In addition to TikTok, Discover Long Island is hosting Facebook Lives and creating engaging

content on other social platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest.

Knowing that angel wings street art is a big trend on social media, Discover Long Island commissioned local artist Kara Hoblin to create and paint wings. There are two murals, one in Port Jefferson and one in Long Beach. The strategy not only drove traffic during the pandemic but spread the brand while supporting local art and culture by adding the two Long Island downtowns.

When Long Island was reopening, one of the other things the organization did was to launch their "Be Safe Pledge" and to partner with Dr. Michele C. Reed, who became their official health and wellness ambassador. In this role, Dr. Reed helps guide venues and businesses on protocols and safety and provides travel-safety tips to residents and travelers alike.

Discover Long Island launched a new "Shop" section on their website with destination-driven merchandise. The idea is that people can wear it and feel like they are representing their community, but at the same time, this helps to spread brand awareness. All the merchandise was from partnerships with well-known, local businesses such as Gage Sunglasses, Hampton Handpoured, Happiest in the Hamptons, Island Strong, and others. They represented a showcase of Long Island products and businesses.

The impact of these innovative approaches on Discover Long Island has been transformational. "Being able to not only get through 2020, but to propel us into being really an asset for our local community, our businesses, our partners, our elected officials makes our whole team feel valued," said Discover Long Island President and CEO Kristen Jarnagin. "It's been just a complete eye-opener for our community as to who we are,

what we do, and it's really kept our entire team motivated and excited to do what we do for a living."

### **About Long Island**

Discover Long Island is the region's official destination marketing and leadership organization charged with furthering the destination's thriving visitor economy, which saw record-breaking highs in 2019 generating \$6.3 billion in visitor spending. The organization ensures Long Island's coveted quality of life, thriving industries, and dynamic destination offerings are promoted on a global level, furthering economic development, and spurring visitation to this world-class destination.



### **COLLABORATION EXERCISE #2**

Think about your community / your destination and take out your notebook and answer the following questions:

1. What problems has the pandemic created for your organization that requires an innovative solution?
2. What non-pandemic problems do you have that need an innovative solution? Which ones need an innovative solution that cost little money?
3. How does your organization regularly identify problems that need innovative solutions?
4. How do you incorporate the community in creating solutions? How have you created solutions where the residents are the audience?

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES**

- [Discover Long Island](#)
- [Discover Long Island YouTube Channel](#)
- [Discover "Long Island Tea" Podcast](#)
- [Discover Long Island Health Tips with Dr. Michele C. Reed](#)
- [Discover Long Island "Be Safe Pledge" Page](#)



## CHAPTER 11

# DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP

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*Destination Stewardship is balancing economic development, sustainable tourism, and quality of life.*

*We understand that we are building value not for ourselves but for our customers, members, stakeholders, and future generations. We understand that this must be done in a way that maintains our community and our assets and preserves our brand while growing opportunity.*

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In 1983, the United Nations tapped former Norwegian prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland to run the new World Commission on Environment and Development. After decades of effort to raise living standards through industrialization, many countries were still dealing with extreme poverty. It seemed that economic development at the cost of ecological health and social equity did not lead to long-lasting prosperity. It was clear that the world needed to find a way to harmonize ecology with prosperity.

After four years, the Brundtland Commission released its final report, “Our Common Future.” It famously defines sustainable development

as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The intent of the definition was to unify environmentalism with social and economic concerns on the world’s development agenda. Sustainability is a holistic approach that considers ecological, social, and economic dimensions, recognizing that all must be considered together to find lasting prosperity.

When we speak of sustainability as a value of destination organizations, we refer to this holistic definition. It is not just the environment, but also the economic and social structure of our communities.

- Environmental Sustainability, when maintained, means all of our community's environmental systems are kept in balance while natural resources are consumed at a rate that allows them to replenish themselves.
- Economic Sustainability means that communities across the globe can maintain their independence and have access to the resources that they require, financial and otherwise, to meet their needs. Economic systems are intact, and activities are available to everyone to secure sources of livelihood.
- Social Sustainability means that universal human rights and basic necessities are attainable by all people. They have access to enough resources to keep their families and communities healthy and secure. Healthy communities have leaders who ensure personal, labor, and cultural rights are respected and all people are included, treated equitably, and protected from discrimination.

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***“Sustainability is no longer about doing less harm. It’s about doing more good.”***

**– Jochen Zetiz**  
*President, CEO and Chairman of the Board of Harley Davidson, Inc.*

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The motivations behind sustainability are often complex, personal, and diverse, and the definition of sustainability is intentionally broad. For sustainability to remain a relevant value, concept, and tool, it is important that each industry adapt a definition to our own context. Furthermore, each destination organization must do the same.

In 2019, Destinations International's DestinationNEXT Futures Study identified,

along with community alignment and digital conversion, destination stewardship as one of three industry-wide transformational opportunities that destination leaders need to leverage collectively to effectively lead their organizations today.

The study spoke of building public-sector coalitions between the visitor industry, economic development agencies, academic institutions, and civic and philanthropic organizations. The goal is to curate more immersive destination experiences, manage sustainable visitor growth, promote equitable economic development, and elevate quality of life and quality of place.

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***“Sustainable development is the pathway to the future we want for all. It offers a framework to generate economic growth, achieve social justice, exercise environmental stewardship, and strengthen governance.”***

**– Ban Ki-moon**  
*Diplomat, Secretary-General of the United Nations, 2007-2016*

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From the 2019 DestinationNEXT Futures Study:

*“The most significant shift overall for destination organizations worldwide is the expanding role from destination marketing to destination management. According to the UNWTO in May 2019, ‘Destination management addresses the interactions between visitors, the industry that serves them, the community that hosts them, and the environment (natural, built, and cultural).’*

*A growing number of destination leaders prefer the term ‘destination stewardship,’ which speaks more to the growing role they have*

*in influencing how government, the industry, visitors, and residents interact, rather than directly 'managing' the destination in any literal sense.*

*Today, destination organizations are focusing more intentionally on developing new destination experiences and stakeholder networks that incorporate a wider breadth of local companies and organizations, including many outside the tourism and hospitality industry."*



This is because there's greater awareness today about how the visitor economy can be leveraged more effectively to drive equitable and sustainable economic development that benefits a broader spectrum of communities in a destination.

Likewise, destination leaders are collaborating more strategically with local organizations and residents to develop more community-driven visitor experiences.

In addition, destination organizations are stewarding their cities through many political, social, economic, and environmental challenges disrupting the global visitor industry. They are

expanding resources dedicated to developing inclusivity and diversity initiatives; improving workforce development and customer-service training; increasing partner education around emerging technologies and consumer trends; addressing myriad social issues impacting both the community and the visitor experience; and a host of other non-sales and marketing responsibilities.

That said, destination stewardship is not about distracting destination organizations from their traditional roles of promoting the region and driving higher visitor volume and spend.

Rather, by expanding their organization's role in destination development and community building, destination leaders can increase sales and marketing opportunities because there's a more immersive, connected, multidisciplinary visitor experience, and a more layered brand story to promote to the world."

For destination organizations, sustainability comes down one more level and is centered on the kind of future our community is leaving for the next generation. But it is also about growing our community in a manner that sustains the elements that make our destinations unique and attractive. It is about taking a holistic approach to the brand of our destination, articulating it, defending it, and promoting it. It is about taking that same approach to all our destination-promotion efforts. And finally, sustainability is a value we need to demonstrate in our policies, everyday activities, and behaviors.

### **STEWARDSHIP EXERCISE #1**



Think about your community / your destination and take out your notebook and answer the following questions:

1. Has anyone in your organization reviewed the DestinationNEXT Futures Study?

2. How does your organization address the environmental, economic, and social aspects of your destination?
3. How does your organization define sustainability? Is it a holistic approach? How does your organization consider the ecological, social, and economic dimensions of your destination?
4. Does your definition have buy-in from the organization's stakeholders and the local community?



### **CASE STUDY: SEDONA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & TOURISM BUREAU**

The concept of managing tourism to ensure that the number of visitors at any time in a destination is within its ability to host without damaging the destination has been recognized by travel industry professionals as a key issue to address. Uncontrolled tourism's impact on the local environment and community can leave, and has left in several cases, a significant negative impact. This in turn has a consequential ramification on all aspects of the destination.

Sedona's Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Bureau recognized the significant wear and tear occurring on the hiking trails in the surrounding area that, left unabated, could result in the loss of Sedona's inspiring natural settings. The increase in visitors on the trails led to littering of trash and destruction of the local scenery and left a bitter taste in the mouths of residents and local businesses. This high level

of traffic along the trails meant that not only were residents being pushed to other areas, but also that there were only a limited number of hospitality related businesses that were benefiting from the economic drive that these visitors bring. This led to increased hostility towards visitors and spurred the Sedona Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Bureau to work to rectify and improve the situation.

In 2016, the chamber / tourism bureau decided to implement a sustainability strategy that would encourage visitation of less-known trails in the area, encourage increased monitoring of littering along trails, and educate visitors to ensure that any rubbish they brought along the trails or the natural areas must be taken back out with them. In addition to this, the strategy would increase partnerships between various industries, business types, and people, to allow for more integration of needs from other local drivers of the economy.

In 2016, Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) did a destination assessment of Sedona that led to the creation of the Sedona Sustainable Tourism Plan, an Arizona first. This effort was led by the chamber / tourism bureau and their partners: the City of Sedona, Nichols Tourism Group, and Arizona State University's Center for Sustainable Tourism. The plan was approved by the Sedona City Council. The plan commits Sedona to balancing a thriving tourism economy and amazing visitor experiences with environmental stewardship and resident quality of life.

In 2017, Mitch Nichols and the Arizona State University's Centre of Sustainability were brought on to consult on the creation of the strategy, with its official launch beginning in 2018. The approach was based on their values of being community minded and accountable. The team leading the project was able to survey residents through mailing, online

questionnaires, and in-person canvassing, using this to understand their residents and key stakeholders' needs regarding tourism.

The strategy itself is built upon four key pillars: the environment, residents, economy, and visitors. Sedona made efforts in collaborating with appropriate partners who could act as leading partners on the different pillars alongside supporting partners. Not only did this give key ownership of various initiatives, but it also gave organizations the option to be as involved as they would like. The strategy is being continually edited, added to, and modified, whilst identifying short-, mid- and long-term goals. This living document is a key reminder as to what aims should be prioritized at different times; however, it needs to be flexible enough to alter its plan when need be (such as the COVID-19 pandemic). The chamber / tourism bureau ensures that they publish reports with updates to the city council and their stakeholders on their website, to ensure that everyone has access to necessary information and the ability to give informed feedback.

Although various initiatives have been born out of the strategy, the destination marketing campaign Sedona Secret Seven was created with the aim of diverting visitor traffic from the main trails to lesser-known ones. Using various methods of social media marketing, partnering with the local park authorities, and more, they were able to promote other areas of the region as something more “unique” and “off the beaten path.” With many visitors and travelers nowadays wanting to have an experience that is different from the norm and is “trendsetting,” the campaign was able to disperse visitor numbers from popular areas, encourage visitors to pick up rubbish on the trails, and bring economic drive to previously less-traveled sites. With 49 new spots to visit, highlighting hiking, biking, and picnic areas, the

campaign has shown tremendous success in diverting visitors.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when the global tourism and hospitality industry has been known to suffer globally, Sedona has exceeded their own expectations with an increase in daily visitors, as well as a dramatic rise in short-term leasing properties. As mentioned by Michelle Conway, director of marketing for the Sedona Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Bureau, “We intend on updating the highlighted destinations to ensure that those that have become more popular can avoid an abundance of visitors and be able to highlight new ‘up and coming’ areas to market to potential visitors.”

Another notable outcome of the sustainability strategy has been the collaboration with the Sedona Trail Keepers, “a local partnership helping maintain Sedona’s 400-plus miles of world-famous red-rock trails, which has reached an impressive total of 50 donating business” (Visit Sedona website). Since its beginnings in 2017, the organization has received close to \$400,000 through donations and partnerships, and the chamber / tourism bureau matches all contributions, therefore doubling the impact. One-hundred percent of the funds are donated to the Coconino National Forest Red Rock Ranger District by the Sedona Red Rock Trail Fund (SRRTF), thereby allowing for more maintenance, environmental protection, and upkeep of the natural environment.

In 2021, Sedona’s sustainability achievements reached new heights on Earth Day as the chamber / tourism bureau joined the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), adding Red Rock Country to destinations around the world committed to sustainable tourism.

Sedona’s commitment to protecting their natural resources and integrating that into the

travel industry and promotional efforts can be seen not only by visitors, but also by residents. Their focus on environment, economic, and social elements of sustainability has earned the trust of their stakeholders and local government. Their constant willingness to alter their goals to better their destination is a clear sign of the stewardship they show towards Sedona, Arizona.

### **Sedona Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Bureau's Vision & Mission**

- **Vision:** Sedona, with its legendary red-rock beauty, is a world-class, year-round destination providing inspiring arts and culture, exhilarating outdoor adventure, and wellness in a friendly and sustainable environment.
- **Mission:** To serve the community by making Sedona the best place to live, work, play, and visit.
- **Core Values:** Community Minded, Professionalism, Sustainability, Partnerships, Innovation, Dedication, Effectiveness, Exceptional Service, and Accountability
- **Stakeholder Promise:** We promise to provide our stakeholders with opportunities to build and grow their businesses.
- **Community Promise:** We promise to be good stewards of Sedona and to sustain a reasonable balance between quality of life and economic interests.
- **Visitor Promise:** We promise to provide a positive and memorable visitor experience.
- **Brand Promise:** Sedona will change you.

## **STEWARDSHIP EXERCISE #2**



Think about your community / your destination and take out your notebook and answer the following questions:

1. Do you have tourism assets that are showing significant wear and tear? Has your organization created a plan to address these?
2. Have you gathered key destination stakeholders and residents to discuss the creation of the destination sustainability strategy? If not, will you?
3. Do you have an engagement strategy to partner with local groups around sustainability?
4. What key sustainability measurements have you created? If none, could you create some?

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES**

- [Our Common Future \(report by the Brundtland Commission\)](#)
- [DestinationNEXT Futures Study](#)
- [Sedona Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Bureau](#)
- [Visit Sedona Website](#)
- [Sedona's Sustainable Tourism Plan](#)
- [Sedona's Sustainable Tourism Plan "Sedona Cares Pledge"](#)
- [Global Sustainable Tourism Council \(GSTC\)](#)



## CHAPTER 12

# RELEVANCE AND THE ARRIVAL OF YOUR DESTINATION

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*Destination Relevance comes from being closely connected to what is being done or considered in our destination.*

*We are relevant in our community. Our leadership, expertise and acumen are understood and valued. We are a reliable source of information. Our ideas and counsel are sought. We have an equity position in the development of our community. Our community understands and supports our programs, and they depend upon us achieving our mission.*

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Relevance is both a value and a destination. Relevance can be a difficult concept to pin down. For our purposes it comes down to visibility, credibility, and authority and each term has two parts — interest and significance. Many destination organizations will focus too much of our efforts on creating interest. They do this by focusing on anything that draws attention, like flashy digital presentations, stunning video, captivating photos, a touch of humor, or interactive games. Our industry is gifted in this area with our wonderful pictures, videos, podcasts, and blogs. The depth of

our marketing talents gives us the ability to generate new and repackage old content to keep us interesting. This is not bad. The talents are not useless. On the contrary. But unless we apply an equal amount of time, energy, and resources having significance, then attention will likely wane.

Destinations organizations need to be consistently visible and bring themselves to people's attention. They must draw the interest of the residents and be part of their community consciousness. This means not just creating

interest. Residents of our communities must also understand the mission, work, and results of their destination organization. They need to see the significance of the destination promotion and the results it produces.

We need to be seen as credible. We may gain their interest by what we do, but we need to build trust and believability to be significant. They trust us because we are inclusive and transparent in the way we operate and the way we engage with them. They believe in us because we seek them out to collaborate. All of this makes us significant. It makes us credible.

We need to bring destination organizations' knowledge and abilities to people's attention. It can attract their interest. But our authority is accepted because of our passion, engagement, inclusiveness, transparency, and collaboration. Our authority is valued because of our innovation, and our stewardship. That is what makes us significant.

This is what it means to be relevant in our community. And because we value relevance, we practice these nine values every day, we recommit to them every year.



## ARRIVAL AT YOUR DESTINATION

Let us go back to Chapter One and the reason why destination organizations exist.

“Every community must compete with every other community for their share of the world's attention, customers and investment. To compete, people need to be aware of a

community, have a positive impression, and want to visit to experience the community and meet its people. This is achieved through clearly developing, articulating, and managing the community's brand. Efforts must be made to promote, market, sell and engage potential visitors. And all of this must be reinforced again and again. Destination organizations are uniquely positioned to do this. Addressing this need for destination promotion is for the benefit and well-being of every person in a community. It is a common good. It is an essential investment to develop opportunities and build quality of life to benefit all the residents of a community.”

The practice of the nine values allows you to do the above with the approval and support of the community. By reconnecting with the community and taking up your leadership role in the community, you can truly achieve your mission.

## RELEVANCE EXERCISE #1



Think about your community, your destination and take out your notebook and answer the following questions:

1. What activities have we accomplished recently that highlights or showcases our passion, engagement, inclusiveness, transparency, collaboration, innovation, and our stewardship?
2. How do you achieve visibility in your community?
3. How do you achieve credibility in your community?
4. How do you achieve authority in your community?
5. How does your organization maintain its relevance in your community?



## 13

# MOVING FORWARD WITH INTENT

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*Intent means having your mind, attention, and will concentrated on something or some end or purpose. For a destination organization, that means first, becoming a shared community value, and second, owning that role of a civic leader. In other words, going forward with intent.*

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We have said hundreds of times, destination organizations becoming a community shared value is the direction that Destinations International believes that our industry must move toward. We are convinced that destination organizations are doomed to a life of periodic political attacks, unstable budget resources, and potential failure unless they turn and focus on their ultimate customer – their residents.

With this change, Destinations International also believes that it is time more destination organizations embrace the civic leadership role that comes with this turn, complete with all the inherent and fiduciary responsibilities involved. Only then will they benefit from their efforts and their newfound position in the community.

Only then will they alleviate, or at least, minimize the risk and uncertainty that will arise from the political side of the community governing process.

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***Moving forward is making things happen.***

**– Anonymous**

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The civic leadership role means that destination organizations now move forward with intent. It means a new start and a new mindset. It means no longer being in a defensive posture where destination organizations defend their mission, accomplishments, how they operate and the service that they provide. Instead, a destination organization acts

proactively to proudly report out their mission, accomplishments, how they operate and the service that they provide. They reach out to include everyone, to listen to everyone, to work with everyone. They have information, they have knowledge, they have connections, and they have tools to build a community. They have an equity stake in the development of their community economic structures, culture and arts, and physical environment. Destination organizations must embrace this and lead.

Destination organizations must be passionate, aware, transparent, inclusive, and engaging. They must be collaborators, innovators, and destination stewards. They must have relevance in their community. They must represent a shared value in the community consciousness. They must be a community asset responsible for programs promoting a community as an attractive travel destination and enhancing its public image as a dynamic place to live and work. They must be an equity partner in their community's economic, social and environmental development.

Destination organizations must be an intentional community leader. It is time to be visible in your community. To be purposeful in your actions. To take a leadership role in the development of your community's brand and reputation as a dynamic place to live, play and work.

## **OUR PROMISE**

Destinations International is here to help.

[Destinations International Staff](#)



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